VINTAGE THEATRE CATALOGS

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OSCAR WILDE IN ATLANTA (1882)

On the fourth of July, 1882, Oscar Wilde visited Atlanta and gave a lecture.

Wilde's greatest works "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and "The Importance of Being Earnest" were a dozen years in the future, but he had published a book of poems and was all the rage in London as founder of the Aesthetic Movement. In Atlanta he would play the opera house built by Laurent DeGive, pronounced "De-jeeve." Edwin, the brother of John Wilkes Booth played the house in February and warmed the stage for Wilde's summer engagement.

AMUSEMENTS.

ONE NIGHT ONLY,

4TH OF JULY.

OSCAR WILDE

WILL LECTURE ON

"DECORATIVE ART,"

—AT—

DeGIVE'S OPERA HOUSE.

Tuesday Evening, July 4,

Under the management of Mr. Peter Tracy, of Memphis, Tenn., by special arrangement with R. D'Oyly Carte, Esq., of London.

PRICES OF ADMISSION:

Dress Circle and Parquette	$1 00
Family Circle	75
Gallery	50

No extra charge for reserved seats. On sale Friday, June 30, at Phillips & Crew's.

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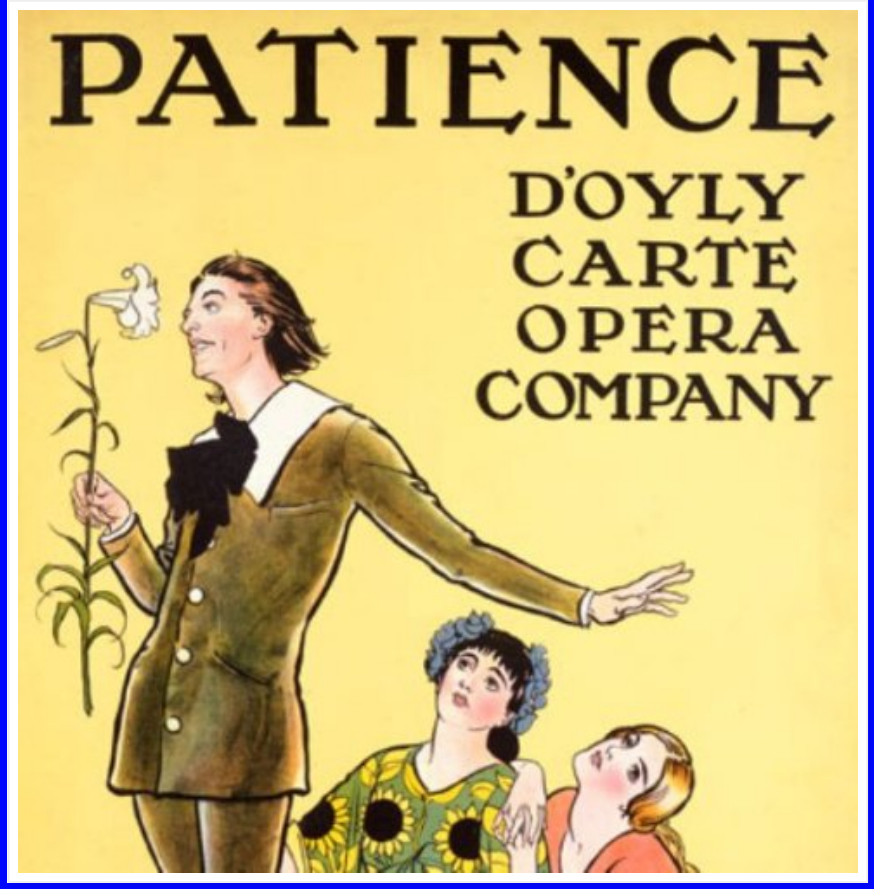
ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 7/01/1882

Wilde's celebrity had been magnified a thousand-fold by Gilbert & Sullivan whose latest London hit "Patience" included a character named Bunthorne, a thinly disguised (and much thinner) Oscar Wilde.



Rather than take umbrage he took advantage, and soon after "Patience" opened in Manhattan in September 1881, Oscar Wilde sailed to America to play a lucrative year of one night lecture stands, presented by Richard D'oyly Carte, agent to G&S as well as the twenty-seven year-old Aesthete, shown below in a portrait taken in New York. "His appearance was striking indeed," reported the Atlanta *Constitution*, "so odd he appeared."

Right prior to playing Atlanta, Wilde had stayed overnight at the Biloxi residence of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, whom he greatly admired. Wilde told the *Constitution* reporter that "We in Ireland are fighting for the principal of autonomy against empire, for independence against centralization, for the principals for which the South fought."

President Davis "did not like" Wilde and retired to bed, but Mrs. Davis did, and she sketched him while they chatted past midnight.

Wilde arrived in Atlanta where everything was new and built upon the ashes left by Sherman when he had burned the city to the

ground twenty years before. Wilde traveled with a valet and a private secretary, and an advance man proceeded them.

Wilde was presented by the Atlanta Young Men's Library Association as a fundraiser toward the goal of building a public library, which they eventually did with the underwriting of Andrew Carnegie. Wilde chose to stay the night at the Markham House (center) across from Union Station (right).

The "Young Men" were dubious, but the *Constitution* reported that "the lecture was an agreeable surprise" probably because Wilde told the audience at the DeGive Opera House (below) that "You have the two perfect essentials for a cultivation of high art: beautiful flowers and beautiful women."

On the portico of one Southern Belle, Wilde remarked "How beautiful is the moonlight falling on the water." "It is beautiful indeed," she replied, "but oh, Mr. Wilde, you should have seen it before the War." No shrine commemorates Oscar Wilde's visit to Dixie, but he is not forgotten in Dublin, with tongue in cheek.

To see and hear an excellent comic number from "Patience" (featuring Bunthorne) click here.

Partial bibliography

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Title illustration from "Atlanta: The Pinnacle City" 1930

For a master index of all photo-essays, click here.

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